

Matthew 17:1-9

I wonder, as they were heading back down the mountain, if James and John said to Peter, “That was such a dumb thing for you to say up there. ‘If you wish, I will make three tents...’ C’mon, Peter, what were you thinking?”

Whether they said this or not, it was a dumb thing to say. The entire scene is serene. It’s breathtaking. A foretaste of heaven itself. Peter, James, and John are privileged to see it with their eyes. It’s a time to observe and take it all in. Not a time to speak. But we know Peter. He would speak out during a solemn moment of silence at a ballgame. And he does. “*Lord, it is good that we are here. I’ll make three tents...*”

Who knows how long he would have kept up this mindless chatter had not the voice of God the Father from the bright cloud shut him up. “*This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!*” In other words, shut your mouth and open your ears. Don’t speak. Listen. Listen to Jesus.

Moses said the same thing 1,500 years earlier. That a great prophet would come after him, and to Him the people should listen. But did they? Hardly. They argued with Jesus. They tried to trap Him with their questions. Finally, they had enough, and they nailed Him to a cross. That was the only way to shut His mouth.

But even then, Jesus kept speaking. Where His words are purely preached and taught, there Jesus is speaking. So did the people listen? When St. Stephen was preaching Christ, they covered their ears and rushed at him, and they stoned him to death. “The reason you do not listen,” Jesus once told them, is because you are not of God. But those who are of God open their ears to hear.”

This is hearing with faith. And this comes first. What Jesus gave to Peter, James, and John is not ordinary. It was only for them. He gave them a brief glance into the glory of heaven itself. We will not be given this same glance. We will not see with our eyes unless we first hear with our ears. The reward of seeing is given to those who listen; who listen to Jesus.

And this is why the Holy Spirit has brought you and me here today. We do many things at church. We sing, we pray, we serve, we fellowship. But none of these can take the place of listening.

People today, however, are much the same as in days of old. They do not want to listen. When God speaks, who is there to hear? Maybe they’re afraid. Maybe we’re afraid. Peter, James, and John were afraid. When God spoke from the cloud, they “*fell on their faces and were terrified,*” it says.

Are we so very different from them? Hopefully not. If we can listen to God’s own words, and be apathetic about it all, something is dreadfully wrong. If it doesn’t upset us, when hearing His Law, that we have offended God by our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, then we have hardened our hearts to the Holy Spirit.

Maybe we picture God as an old grandpa sitting in His rocking chair up in heaven, looking down on us with a twinkle in His eye. But that's not how Peter, James, and John saw Him. They were terrified, and rightly so. God is holy, and we are not. And we need to remember this.

We are about to enter the season of Lent. We need to pause and reflect during this time. It was our sinfulness that sent our Lord to the cross. This is why Lent is a penitential season in the church.

I pity those who can easily pass over Lent as if it was no big deal. It is a big deal! Your Lord, and mine, appeased the wrath of God. He became our substitute. He went into hell and back for us. And for this reason alone, though we will not get a glimpse of heaven in this lifetime as Peter, James, and John did, we do have a place there waiting for us when we die in Christ.

Jesus is the one who calms our fears. Look at Peter, James, and John. They were terrified on that mountain. "*Listen to Jesus!*" boomed the Father from heaven. And the next thing they know, Jesus is gently touching them, and says, "*Rise, and have no fear.*"

Oh my, what comfort. It was an amazing thing for them to see Jesus' divine majesty. But we cannot handle that right now. We need the gentle, loving Jesus who touches us in our fears and puts them to rest. In heaven we will see Jesus in His full majesty. But until then we need Him to come to us in water, bread and wine, and with words of forgiveness and assurance.

"*Rise,*" He says to you, "*and have no fear.*" What's troubling you? What guilt is plaguing you? Don't be afraid. Does the Law condemn you? "*Rise,*" says Jesus, "*and have no fear.*" He was condemned by the Law in your place. Is there some sin, some awful thing in your past that is haunting you? "*Rise,*" says Jesus, "*and have no fear.*" Your sin; that very sin is forgiven.

This is why Jesus refused to stay on that mountain. He had to go to the cross to die for you. "*Lord,*" said Peter, "*it is good that we are here. Let's stay. I'll build some tents.*" No! For you and I needed a Savior. Not a majestic Lord who calls, "Come up to Me and see My glory," but a Suffering Servant who poured out His blood for you; who declares you forgiven; and who comes to you gently and mercifully in His blessed Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And this is why, every morning of your life, you who are God's baptized and forgiven child in Christ, can rise and have no fear. Amen.